

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

SE Other
 HD **Can our kids – and, just as crucially, tomorrow’s – have a future if the planet is on fire? A major report calls for a rethink of children’s health approaches – to consider sustainability, and ensure tomorrow’s kids can be healthy, too**
 BY André Picard
 WC 876 words
 PD 24 February 2020
 SN The Globe and Mail (Breaking News)
 SC GMBN
 LA English
 CY ©2020 The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.

LP

Every child on earth faces existential threats from climate change, ecological degradation, pervasive inequality and exploitative marketing.

That is the grim message delivered in a new report entitled [“A Future For the World’s Children?”](#)

TD

Prepared by 40 international experts in child and adolescent health under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and the medical journal The Lancet, the report says there have been dramatic improvements in child health over the past two decades, but the progress risks being lost – principally because of climate change.

“We live in an era like no other. Our children face a future of great opportunity, but they stand on the precipice of a climate crisis ... our challenge is great, and we seem to be paralyzed,” the report reads.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the WHO, called the report a “wake-up call,” saying it shows that the world’s decision-makers are failing today’s children and youth by “failing to protect their health, failing to protect their rights, and failing to protect their planet.”

The commission measured and ranked the health of children in 180 countries, based on two criteria: “flourishing,” a measure of health, education and nutrition that are the standard way of considering child health, and “sustainability,” a proxy for greenhouse-gas emissions and equity (or inequality as measured by income gaps.)

In doing so, it called for a radical rethink of how we look at child health – one that considers not only the present state of their health but future risks to their health.

Canada doesn’t particularly distinguish itself in this [analysis](#) . It sits at 21st in the flourishing ranking and 170th in the sustainability ranking.

Canada’s CO2 emissions are 15.64 tonnes per capita – which exceeds the 2030 targets established in the 2015 [Paris Climate Change Agreement](#) by a staggering 477 per cent.

The best country in which to be a child, as virtually every study shows, is Norway, and it again comes in at No. 1. Yet even Norway is only 156th out of 180 countries in the sustainability rankings, with 8.44 tonnes of CO2 emissions per capita – 212 per cent above the 2030 targets.

At the other end of the spectrum are countries such as Central African Republic, which has dismal child health outcomes, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has a mere 0.06 tonnes of CO2 emissions per capita, 98 per cent ahead of its 2030 targets.

No country ranks well in both flourishing and sustainability, highlighting a paradox: The countries that take the best care of their children today are the greatest contributors to climate change, which imperils children's future.

The giant carbon footprint of wealthy countries is crushing children's hopes for a healthy future.

At the same time, the report notes that the poorest countries are at greatest risk from climate change, despite having the smallest carbon footprint.

The only way to change this dire prognosis is to massively reduce our CO2 emissions and, by extension, to rethink our economic model, the report concludes.

To do so, political, business and social leaders need to empower children and youth – to heed the warnings and demands of the Greta Thunberg generation, if you will.

In addition to the impact of climate change, there are two other issues that imperil children around the world, according to the report: inequality and exploitative business practices.

While child poverty rates are falling, the gap between the rich and the poor is growing, as is the marginalization of minority groups such as Indigenous peoples and children with developmental, physical or psychiatric disabilities.

The report's authors also have pointed words about the harmful marketing of tobacco, alcohol, e-cigarettes, sugar-sweetened beverages, gambling and infant formula, all of which affect young people.

They note that children in some countries see as many as 30,000 TV ads a year, most of them touting unhealthy products. The US\$70-billion-a-year market for infant formula also undermines best practices around breastfeeding.

This ad blitzkrieg is a significant contributor to the obesity epidemic, they argue; childhood obesity rates have jumped elevenfold since 1975.

"The task at hand is urgent and immense," the commission said. But it is nonetheless "optimistic that it is still possible to change the world for the better, for and with children. There can be no excuses, and no time to lose."

In other words, it was channelling the cri de coeur of climate activist Greta Thunberg, who, at the 2019 World Economic Forum in Davos, said: "I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is."

Keep your Opinions sharp and informed. Get the Opinion newsletter. [Sign up today](#).

Follow this link to view this story on globeandmail.com: [Can our kids – and, just as crucially, tomorrow's – have a future if the planet is on fire?](#) The viewing of this article is only available to Globe Unlimited subscribers.

The Globe and Mail

NS	gihea : Infant/Child/Teenage Health gclimt : Climate Change gsust : Sustainable Development/Sustainability gcat : Political/General News genv : Natural Environment gglobe : Global/World Issues ggrou : Demographic Health ghea : Health
RE	cana : Canada namz : North America
IPD	climate
PUB	The Globe and Mail Inc.
AN	Document GMBN000020200224eg2o003bh

Search Summary

Text	"climate activist"
Date	20170101 to 20231231
Source	The Globe and Mail - All sources
Author	All Authors
Company	All Companies
Subject	All Subjects
Industry	All Industries
Region	All Regions
Language	English
Results Found	186
Timestamp	19 July 2023 9:59 AM